



MITTERRAND ENDS SOUTH AMERICAN TOUR: President François Mitterrand, left, sipping rum punch from a coconut yesterday as President Belisario Betancur of Colombia, right, and Foreign Minister Ramirez

Ocampo, center, awaited his reaction. During Mr. Mitterrand's visit to Cartagena, the last stop on his tour of South America, he pledged France's firm backing for young democracies threatened by foreign debt.

Agence France-Press

Mexico's Gigantic Task: Rebuilding

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By WILLIAM STOCKTON

Special to The New York Times

MEXICO CITY, Oct. 20 — At the busy corner of Insurgentes Avenue and Monterrey Street in the heart of Mexico City, a work crew labored Friday to create a park on a site where just a few days before a pile of earthquake rubble stood, the remains of a four-story furniture store and warehouse.

The workmen smoothed topsoil that had been trucked in, laid out strips of sod and planted shrubs and young trees, creating an oasis of green amid the office buildings and stores and traffic.

Four blocks to the south on Insurgentes, the hulk of what was once a 10-story office building sits abandoned. Its top three floors collapsed, partly sliding onto the smaller building next door and causing it, too, to collapse.

Ropes with bits of colored cloth have been strung along the sidewalk to warn pedestrians not to venture too close. But otherwise the building remains untouched since two earthquakes struck Mexico City on Sept. 19 and 20.

Slow and Costly Process

The park and the derelict office building are typical of Mexico City a month after the earthquakes.

Mexico's President, Miguel de la Madrid, has told the city's residents in television addresses and public appearances that Mexico City is on its feet and moving forward. Government officials have promised to turn the sites of many destroyed buildings into parks. The park that took shape Friday is a symbol of the Government's eagerness to move forward with the reconstruction of the center of the city, where the earthquake damage was concentrated.

But the broken office building and dozens of others like it where workmen with their cranes and dump trucks have yet to begin the dangerous work of demolition reveal how difficult, costly and slow the process of demolition and reconstruction will be.

Death Toll Estimates Vary

For one thing, bodies are still being pulled from the rubble. And the Government said last week that it is housing and feeding more than 33,000 homeless people in shelters. There are indications that thousands more not included in the official count are living in the streets in makeshift tents and shantytown houses of plastic and plywood or in private shelters and being cared for by churches and groups of volunteers. Unaccounted thousands of others

whose homes were destroyed or so badly damaged that they are uninhabitable have moved in with friends or relatives.

The number of homeless most often cited, and the number used by the United States Embassy, is 50,000. Some groups have used much higher numbers.

Estimates of the death toll vary widely.

A spokesman in the office of Mexico City's Mayor said last week that 1,970 people killed in the earthquake had been identified and that 359 other bodies remained to be identified. For several weeks Government agencies have put the death toll at 4,600. The United States Embassy puts the number at 7,000. Other groups use larger figures.

Water Supplies Cut Off

Water supplies have been cut off to thousands of people in the earthquake zones, including many people whose homes were undamaged. A common sight each day are lines of children and women with buckets, awaiting their turn at the hose from a tank truck or dipping water from an underground cistern.

Government officials said that 3,124 buildings were damaged in the earthquakes, including 412 that collapsed. Some 595 more are considered beyond repair.

Particularly hard hit were Government buildings, some of which collapsed. Many others are still standing, but will have to be demolished.

As a result, many sectors of the Mexican bureaucracy are in disarray.

The Mexico City courts, for example, were badly damaged and some courts are still not functioning.

Two civil court high-rise buildings did not collapse, but they cannot be occupied. Workers were busy Thursday removing office furniture and files and loading them onto trucks to be moved to temporary quarters across the city.

At another seriously damaged office complex where many court offices were located workers have punched holes in the walls of each floor of the 21-story buildings and are using cranes to retrieve furniture and files.

On Thursday, a worker on the 12th floor was shoveling debris from the open side of the building to the ground. The debris included boxes and boxes of documents, their contents filling the air with a blizzard of white papers.

Workers moving the retrieved furniture and loading it on trucks said most

of the court's important files had been salvaged.

Search for Files Goes On

The building that housed the office of the Mexico City Attorney General, who prosecutes criminal cases, was destroyed. There were reports last week of criminal cases that could not be prosecuted because of lost files.

But a spokesman for the Attorney General said 90 percent of the files had been retrieved and the staff continued to search in the ruins for more.

A case of particular interest to the United States Government is that of Caro Quintero, who is accused in the death last winter of a United States Drug Enforcement Agency agent and his pilot. An embassy spokesman said American officials had been reassured by Mexican authorities that all the documents involved in the case were intact and that it was moving forward.

The 21-floor building housing the Foreign Ministry was damaged badly enough that engineers suggested the ministry's workers evacuate it until repairs can be made. Workers are in temporary quarters all around the city.

The Foreign Minister, Bernardo Sepúlveda, and his immediate staff will move in the next few days to a ballroom in the fashionable Polanco section of the city.

Vigil at Hospital Continues

In a city in which many tragic scenes have been witnessed in the last month, one of the saddest continues each day outside Juárez Hospital, where a wing collapsed, trapping perhaps more than 800 people inside.

It was here that nearly four dozen babies were extricated alive from the ruins, some as long as a week after the earthquakes. But that miracle has been muted by the sad vigil that family members of those still inside maintain at the hospital where, as of Thursday, 465 bodies, including those of 59 doctors, had been found.

A month later, those whose loved ones have still not been found or identified cluster outside the emergency room entrance, awaiting news. Inside, doctors try to identify the now badly decomposed bodies.

Commodities
Monday through Friday
in Business Day
The New York Times

been behind his ambitious
of civil liberties
gua last week. Such steps
sary, he said, to deny the a
ment guerrillas a chance
when they were "on the very
eliminated.

"When we have victory
of our hands we are not going
that it be denied us by a vic
sive by the Pentagon and
Mr. Ortega said in an interv
hattan. "The state of
been declared fundamental
bat the possibility of the co
ing an internal front."

The remarks came as
change of tone for Mr. Or
the past has consistently
assessments of the immen
domestic challenges the
revolution faces and the
sions has publicly predict
vasion of his country. The
States was in the works.

In New York for U.S. Aid

But in an hourlong
gua's military, political
situation yesterday
in New York for cere
the 40th anniversary
tions, demonstrated
optimism that he
improvements in the
position "compared
ago."

"We've got them
feated, demoralized
he said of the rebel
have to maintain the
to guarantee their str
can't let them come
back."

That evaluation diffe
from views expressed
ers of the main arm
Nicaraguan Democr
have pointed to
provinces, an indic
substantial new arm
signs of strength and
heavy fighting during
season.

Mr. Ortega also
the impact of United
rebel forces, both
"nonlethal" logistic
ready in the pipeline
military assistance
proved in the future
Sandinista Army was
win on the field of
what Washington
hoped such a victory
the Reagan Administr
ate some sort of muni
ment with his Govern
ment.

Mr. Ortega said that
of a state of emergency
an attempt to use "formal
anisms to smash any at
ist activity" by what he
"desperate" coalition of
thizers and American
agencies.

Mr. Ortega said he
pension of civil rights
ragua's image abroad
his Government could
otherwise at such a
cost.

"We prefer to pay
this moment," he
higher cost, which
gation of this
bility that the
succeed in recon
struction."

Thousand

ESTELI, 30
days after the
the region was
the last of
Barranca